

Watergate cover-up trial picks up speed

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The Watergate cover-up trial is moving along on a swifter timetable than originally planned.

The government prosecution now expects to complete its case by Thursday, instead of by Thanksgiving. The defense portion of the trial, too, may move along more speedily.

As U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica, put it to the jury at the end of last week: "Let's hope it won't be long before you finish this case, and you'll be able to go home for the holidays."

The new time factor puts added pressure on the team of three physicians appointed by the court to pin down more quickly the answer to whether or not former President Nixon will be able to testify for the defense in the trial. The medical panel has indicated it wants authorization, in the form of advance clearance from Mr. Nixon, before proceeding with its examination.

A harried lawyer

Rushing back and forth between two courtrooms Friday where either Mr. Nixon as a witness or the status of his documents were being questioned, a harried Herbert J. Miller, the former President's attorney, agreed that he would try his best to find out by Tuesday whether or not Mr. Nixon would consent to the independent examination.

"I haven't had an opportunity to speak to my client for some time," he noted.

Chief prosecutor James F. Neal, indicating what is in store for the jury this week, said there would be about five more witnesses and up to 2½ days of listening to tapes — "until we're all sick and tired" of hearing them. While there are 23 more tapes which

could be heard, the list is sure to be pared.

While the defense has yet to unveil its strategy in questioning defense-summoned witnesses, one prominent element in that strategy surfaced last week in course of cross-examining prosecution witness Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Haldeman defense pressed

Lawyers for former White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman, for instance, sought to show that their client may well have had more than a political concern in suggesting that the CIA curb the FBI investigation of the Watergate break-in. Attorney Frank H. Strickler drew an admission from Mr. Walters, who was very new on the job when asked by the White House to approach the FBI on a cutoff, that he "presumed" at the time that the CIA had a station and other resources in Mexico (which might have been uncovered in the course of a more thorough FBI probe).

When the investigation was quashed, the FBI was tracing the origin of checks found on the Watergate burglars. That money could have been traced to campaign contributions given the Committee for the Re-election of the President which had passed through Mexican banks. Haldeman attorney John Wilson, under prodding from Mr. Neal, indicated that the argument that his client might have been motivated in part by CIA concerns in the cutoff, "is no shallow effort on our part."

For its part, the prosecution argues that the "resignation tape" of June 23, 1972, in which Mr. Haldeman and the former President discuss how the FBI probe is to be cut off, is "pristine clear" on the point that motivation was strictly political. Mr. Neal contends that Mr. Walters was simply a "ready tool" to serve as the conduit.